



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

101 N. 14TH ST., 17TH FLOOR
RICHMOND, VA 23219

*Air Force Association
American Legion
AMVETS
Association of the United
States Army
Disabled American
Veterans
Fifth Baptist Veterans
Ministry
Fleet Reserve Association
Iraq and Afghanistan
Veterans of America
Korean War Veterans
Association
Legion of Valor of the
U.S., Inc.
Marine Corps League
Military Order of the
Purple Heart
Military Officers Association
of America
Military Order of the
World Wars
Navy Mutual Aid Association
Navy Seabee Veterans of
America
Non-Commissioned
Officers Association
Paralyzed Veterans of
America
Reserve Officers Association
Roanoke Valley Veterans
Council
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Vietnam Veterans of America
Virginia Army/Air National
Guard Enlisted
Association
Virginia National Guard
Association
Women Marines Association*

Governor Ralph S. Northam
Patrick Henry Building
1111 E. Broad St., 3rd Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

On behalf of the Joint Leadership Council, I write to share that we have been briefed on the Virginia National Guard (VNG) actively losing recruits and current Virginia Guardsmen to surrounding states who offer free college tuition for members, and assistance to family members as well. The two National Guard VSOs – Virginia National Guard Association and the Virginia Army/Air National Guard Enlisted Association have come together in past sessions to advocate for increasing VNG State Tuition Assistance budget allotment, improving the Commonwealth's commitment to the men and women of their National Guard.

The VNG is a tip of the spear force, offering cutting-edge weapons systems and mission, and currently postured to grow strength and fiscal returns for Virginia. Loss of structure means potentially losing millions of dollars in equipment, facilities, and personnel dollars for Virginia, plus any chance at future growth. Investing in guardsmen through tuition assistance comes back to Virginia through additional funds spent at Virginia's colleges, universities, and other continuing education courses, increased salaries, and most importantly, not only skilled soldiers but skilled workers participating in Virginia's economy.

Free tuition, the ultimate goal of increased funds for State Tuition Assistance, serves as a strong recruiting and retention incentive. Since Guardsmen are less transient than active duty, they are much more likely to go to school, work, live, shop, and enjoy leisure activities within the Commonwealth.

The Department of Military Affairs continues to research this topic extensively. In gathering data from other states, taking a detailed look at the current STA program from various perspectives within the organization, and by seeking counsel from other state agencies as well as colleges and universities, we believe that marginally increasing the budget allotment, which has not been raised in over a decade, is a strong first step toward improving the State Tuition Assistance Program.

The JLC requests that the Governor support the new VNG Tuition Assistance Working Group, that has been meeting throughout 2019 to study the program, and to support any recommended changes to internal policy and requested legislative or budgetary support, to best optimize the program that this working group presents.

Sincerely,
Frank G. Wickersham, III
Chairman
MOAA Representative

cc: Secretary Carlos Hopkins